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## **CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS OF SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENTALLY ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT OF TERRITORIAL COMMUNITIES IN THE UKRAINIAN CARPATHIANS**

*This article offers a research-informed analysis of the challenges and prospects of sustainable environmentally oriented development of territorial communities in the Ukrainian Carpathians in the context of decentralisation, European integration and post-war recovery. The purpose is to summarise the current condition of mountain communities, identify the key constraints on their socio-economic and environmental capacity, and substantiate directions for improving local development policy by drawing on European approaches to supporting mountain areas. The methodological*

*basis combines systemic and institutional approaches, comparative analysis of mountain-policy models, content analysis of legal acts and strategic documents, and synthesis of Ukrainian scholarly findings. The results indicate that, after the local government reform, Carpathian communities gained broader managerial and fiscal opportunities, yet their realisation is limited by staff shortages, misalignment between residents' priority needs and local policy actions, demographic and migration shifts, and rising environmental risks intensified by the war. It is argued that strategic planning should integrate ecological limits and territorial potential, while linking infrastructure recovery with tourism and recreation development, support for small and medium-sized enterprises, the formation of ecological culture, and fiscal equalisation instruments that reflect mountain specificities. A definition is proposed in which sustainable environmentally oriented community development is understood as a purposeful, long-term set of governance actions aimed at improving quality of life while preserving natural capital and ensuring intergenerational justice. It is concluded that strengthening the capacity of Carpathian communities requires institutional reinforcement of local governance, deeper partnerships with EU communities, and the implementation of adapted European practices for mountain-area support.*

**Keywords:** *Ukrainian Carpathians, territorial community, public governance, sustainable environmentally oriented development, post-war recovery.*

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## **ПРОБЛЕМИ І ПЕРСПЕКТИВИ СТАЛОГО ЕКОЛОГООРІЄНТОВАНОГО РОЗВИТКУ ТЕРИТОРІАЛЬНИХ ГРОМАД УКРАЇНСЬКИХ КАРПАТ**

*У статті здійснено науково-прикладний аналіз проблем та перспектив сталого еколого-орієнтованого розвитку територіальних громад Українських Карпат у контексті децентралізації, європейської інтеграції та повоєнного відновлення. Метою дослідження визначено узагальнення сучасного стану гірських громад, виявлення ключових обмежень їх соціально-економічної і екологічної спроможності та обґрунтування напрямів удосконалення місцевої політики розвитку з опорою на європейські підходи до підтримки гірських територій. Методологічну основу становлять системний і інституційний підходи, порівняльний аналіз моделей державної гірської політики, контент-аналіз нормативно-правових актів і стратегічних документів, а також узагальнення результатів вітчизняних досліджень з проблематики територіального розвитку. Доведено, що після реформи місцевого самоврядування громади Карпатського регіону отримали ширші управлінські та фінансові можливості, однак їх реалізація стримується дефіцитом кадрів, неузгодженістю пріоритетів між населенням і владою, демографічними та міграційними зрушеннями, а також зростанням екологічних ризиків, що посилюються війною. Обґрунтовано, що стратегічне планування розвитку має інтегрувати екологічні обмеження і потенціал територій, поєднувати*

*відновлення інфраструктури з розвитком туризму та рекреації, підтримкою малого й середнього бізнесу, формуванням екологічної культури та інструментами фінансового вирівнювання з урахуванням гірської специфіки. Сформульовано авторське визначення сталого еколого-орієнтованого розвитку територіальної громади як цільового процесу управлінських дій, спрямованих на довгострокове підвищення якості життя за умови збереження природного капіталу й міжпоколінної справедливості. Зроблено висновок, що підвищення спроможності карпатських громад потребує інституційного посилення місцевого врядування, розвитку партнерств з громадами ЄС та впровадження адаптованих європейських практик підтримки гірських територій.*

***Ключові слова:** Українські Карпати, територіальна громада, публічне врядування, сталий еколого-орієнтований розвиток, повосінне відновлення.*

**Problem statement.** The reform of local self-government and the territorial organisation of power, implemented in Ukraine in the pre-war period, substantially reshaped the scale and configuration of governance at the basic level, because the consolidation of administrative units and the strengthening of predominantly rural territorial communities created prerequisites for moving from a largely subsidy-driven logic of functioning to a development-oriented logic, where local decisions become decisive for reproducing human capital, sustaining economic activity and protecting the environment.

Given Ukraine's European integration trajectory, the reform acquired additional meaning, since at the level of EU strategic orientations it is recognised that «rural areas are the fabric of our society and the heart of the European Union's economy. They are a core part of our identity and our economic potential. We will protect and preserve our rural areas and invest in their future» [24]. Within this vision, the development of rural, including mountain, areas is treated as a long-term process that must reconcile economic objectives with ecological limits and social cohesion; moreover, Ukrainian experts emphasise that «the decentralisation reform not only created new opportunities

for the development of territorial communities, but also introduced a European model of municipal self-government adapted to national conditions, thereby bringing our state closer to EU standards» [15, p. 157], and therefore decentralisation changes may be interpreted as an institutional prerequisite for post-war recovery within the paradigm of sustainable environmentally oriented development.

It is also important that practical European integration progress often starts in territories where stable horizontal links with communities in EU Member States have already been formed, a record of joint projects has been accumulated, and institutional capacity for partnership interaction has been secured; in this sense, border territorial communities of the Carpathian region of Ukraine possess an enhanced potential to «better understand the features of contemporary development and possess the necessary knowledge, information, skills and experience to further ensure the competitiveness of their communities» [2, p. 173], including through positioning their resources and advantages in the European space.

Accordingly, the research problem of identifying the specific features of shaping and implementing a policy of sustainable environmentally oriented development of territorial communities in the Ukrainian Carpathians becomes particularly relevant under contemporary conditions and in the period of post-war recovery, when reconstruction needs increase, risks of degradation of natural ecosystems intensify, and requirements for the effectiveness of local governance become stricter.

**Purpose of the article.** The purpose of this publication is to analyse the current condition and the problems of development of Ukraine's mountain territorial communities and, on this basis, to substantiate research-informed foundations for shaping and implementing sustainable environmentally oriented development of territorial communities in the Ukrainian Carpathians in the post-war period, while taking into account the need to combine recovery measures with long-term objectives of improving quality of life and preserving natural capital.

**Review of recent research and publications.** The issue of socio-economic development of territorial communities consistently remains among the priorities of state interests, because the outcomes of local development directly affect domestic political and economic dynamics, cultural reproduction, and the capacity of the state to achieve international objectives; in this context, economically and environmentally oriented territorial development forms a basis for improving quality of life and strengthening social self-esteem through the formation of social, political, economic and institutional systems aimed at increasing the prestige of the individual in society [13].

Within the scholarly discourse that directly concerns mountain-area development and public administration of territorial development, relevant contributions have been made by S. Kryshchanovych, K. Tsvirko, V. Kravtsiv, P. Zhuk, T. Bezsmertnyuk, I. Tyshchuk and M. Pasichnyk, O. Harashchuk, V. Kutsenko and A. Kudierova, R. Kostyk, M. Kholchenkov, I. Svyda and V. Khymynets, whose works combine economic, socio-political and environmental dimensions of territorial development.

In particular, a substantial contribution to the governance dimension of mountain-area development is provided in S. Kryshchanovych's monograph «Public Management of the Socio-Economic Development of Mountain Areas in the Carpathian Region», which offers a comprehensive analysis of socio-economic dynamics in mountain areas in Ukraine and EU countries and emphasises the role of strategies and programmes as instruments for ensuring sustainable development [12]; by contrast, K. Tsvirko outlines conceptual guidelines for sustainable territorial development as an object of public administration [23].

The European dimension of Ukraine's mountain-area development is discussed by V. Kravtsiv and P. Zhuk [10], regulatory foundations of ecological tourism are analysed by T. Bezsmertnyuk, I. Tyshchuk and M. Pasichnyk [1], while issues of ecological culture as a factor of contemporary socio-economic community development are addressed by O. Harashchuk, V. Kutsenko and A. Kudierova [4];

comparative analysis of foreign models of regional policy is presented by R. Kostyk [9] and M. Kholchenkov [22], the role of mountain areas in the context of sustainable development of the Carpathians is highlighted by I. Svyda [20], and prospects of ecological and economic development of the Carpathian region, together with mechanisms of implementing European practices, are discussed by V. Khymynets [21].

Taken together, these studies form the source and conceptual basis of the present research, while the need to focus on the post-war context and on institutional mechanisms of environmentally oriented development of Carpathian communities determines the relevance of further analytical deepening.

**Research methodology.** The methodological basis of the study comprises systemic and institutional approaches that make it possible to view a territorial community as an open socio-economic system with its own resources, constraints and mechanisms of collective action, as well as an institutionally embedded level of public governance influenced simultaneously by national policies, European standards and local governance practices.

Within the implemented research design, methods of analysis and synthesis, abstraction and generalisation were used to identify the key problems of mountain community development, the comparative method was applied to juxtapose the approaches of EU countries and Ukraine to mountain policy, and content analysis was employed with regard to legal acts and strategic documents that regulate mountain-area development, tourism and regional policy; the empirical basis was formed through synthesis of conclusions from contemporary peer-reviewed publications and analytical materials included in the list of sources, which supports the reproducibility of the argumentation and the correctness of references.

**Presentation of the main research material.** Decentralisation transformations changed the role of local self-government bodies, which have gradually moved from a predominantly governed object to a responsible subject of development, implying both an expansion of powers and stricter requirements for the quality of local governance; within Ukraine's European integration course, such quality should be commensurate

with contemporary EU values and standards, above all in terms of moving from short-term administrative decisions towards strategically oriented policy in which economic outcomes, social cohesion and environmental security are treated as interdependent objectives.

In this article, sustainable environmentally oriented development of territorial communities is understood as a purposeful, institutionally supported and socially agreed process of shaping and implementing local public policy in which local self-government bodies, together with residents and other stakeholders, ensure a long-term improvement in quality of life and community economic capacity through rational resource use, restoration and preservation of natural ecosystems, reduction of environmental risks and the pursuit of intergenerational justice, while avoiding the exceedance of the area's ecological carrying capacity and replacing extensive growth models with models of innovative and socially responsible economic activity.

The effectiveness of locally driven, environmentally oriented socio-economic development is determined by a set of interconnected factors, among which an important place is occupied by taking community needs into account, reconciling interests and fostering co-operation among a wide range of stakeholders, innovation as a source of competitive advantages, and systemic, comprehensive governance decisions; additionally, strategic vision, planning and forecasting based on clearly defined objectives and tasks, as well as long-term orientation towards solving key problems and challenges, remain crucial [8, c. 85].

Given the constitutionally enshrined course of Ukraine towards European integration, the synthesis of foreign experience of state mountain policy, primarily that of EU countries, becomes especially important for effectively addressing the socio-economic problems of mountain territories, since the systemic involvement of governments in supporting the life-sustaining functions of mountain areas acts as a guarantee of sustainable financial and economic, socio-political and environmentally oriented development of territorial communities.

Because a significant part of mountain territories in Europe and Ukraine is peripheral and operates under complex natural constraints, these areas require a special, comprehensive and long-term policy capable of simultaneously guaranteeing the population's right to live and work and ensuring the preservation of the natural environment at an acceptable level of well-being; world practice thus justifies an understanding of mountain policy as an instrument for tackling multidimensional socio-economic problems of mountain districts, yet, as M. Kholchenkov emphasises, «it should be understood that the full implementation of the multidimensional European experience inevitably requires an exceptionally balanced and differentiated approach, given the existing institutional asymmetry and the substantial divergence of historical trajectories of socio-economic development in Ukraine and in EU Member States» [22, p. 575].

EU policy towards mountain and other disadvantaged territories is predominantly of a incentive-based character, because its logic rests on moving away from the dominance of direct budget subsidies and on a shift of emphasis towards building institutional foundations and creating a favourable environment for business activity on the basis of sustainable, environmentally oriented development [25, p. 13]; an important stage in establishing this approach was the adoption of the European Charter for Mountain Regions, under which Council of Europe member states undertook to ensure legal recognition of the special nature of mountain regions, which should be reflected both in the organisation of political and administrative structures and in specific sectoral policies; to develop and implement such spatial planning policy in mountain regions as would promote sustainable development of traditional activities while taking environmental protection needs into account [9].

With regard to the Ukrainian context, it is appropriate to stress that the state has introduced certain instruments of socio-economic support for mountain territories, largely focused on mountain settlements and based on criteria for their identification that acquired a legal basis through inclusion in the provisions of the Law of Ukraine «On the status of mountain settlements in Ukraine»; within the operation of the existing

instruments of mountain policy, primarily aimed at social protection of citizens living in settlements granted mountain status, P. Zhuk considers such an approach to territorial typology to be justified [6, p. 23].

Some governance relevance for mountain regions is also provided by the governmental «Strategy for the Development of Tourism and Resorts for the period until 2026», which formulates tasks of ensuring effective and comprehensive use of tourism and resort-recreational potential, including through addressing the problems of recreational природокористування and environmental protection, improving the territorial structure of tourism, creating conditions for optimising the organisational and economic structure of activity of small and medium-sized businesses, and developing national standards for tourism services in line with international standards [19].

In general, state policy for developing territorial communities in Ukraine's mountain regions is shaped at the intersection of international legal documents, the State Regional Development Strategy for 2021–2027 and the State Programme for the Development of the Ukrainian Carpathians Region for 2020–2022, which envisaged infrastructure measures, maintenance of socio-cultural facilities, prudent use of natural resources, enhanced protection of natural ecosystems, strengthening of environmental security and prevention of consequences of technogenic disasters; at the same time, according to N. Pankiv, the tourism and recreation sector was declared a strategic direction for the development of the Carpathian region's economy, capable of ensuring stable growth of budget revenues and a positive spill-over effect on many sectors of the economy [17, c. 73].

The tourism and recreation sector is indeed among the most promising directions for sustainable development of communities in mountain regions, because the diversified resource potential of the Carpathians creates grounds for developing multiple tourism and recreation types; as V. Khymynets notes, «in most mountain regions of the world, recreational activity is associated with the use of forest, climatic, speleological and water resources, including balneological resources. Thus, a wide

variety of tourism types may develop in such areas: climate and balneotherapy; speleological tourism; ski tourism; excursion tourism; rural tourism; adventure tourism; mountaineering; hunting and fishing, and many others. Like hardly any other area not only in Ukraine but also globally, the Carpathian region corresponds to these requirements most fully» [21, p. 25].

At the same time, the full-scale war has substantially disrupted pre-war development plans and led to a significant range of new problems affecting the functioning of mountain territories of the Ukrainian Carpathians, which have both socio-economic and environmental dimensions.

Among such problems, experts identify discrepancies between communities' priority needs and actions by local authorities to meet them, alongside an insufficient level of service quality provided by local authorities [18, p. 91]; they also highlight a large number of internally displaced persons and related challenges of employment, adaptation and self-identification, including community and national identities, as well as possible pathways of cultural and ethnocultural development [11, p. 32]; in demographic terms, changes in the composition of residents due to mobilisation alter the structure of the community's and the region's productive forces, while in human resources terms staff shortages in local public administration bodies and low resident participation in solving community issues persist [3, p. 186]; simultaneously, threats of environmentally hazardous technogenic accidents and disasters are increasing.

Evidently, the list is not exhaustive, yet it clearly demonstrates that the combination of recovery pressures, security risks and structural population changes forms a new configuration of governance tasks for Carpathian communities.

In the perspective of sustainable environmentally oriented development of mountain communities, key importance is attached to the preparation and research-based justification of programmes for rebuilding destroyed territories and to balanced development of those communities that will remain relatively undamaged after the end of the war; at the same time, consistent strengthening of local self-government capacity should rely on further transfer of powers and budgetary resources, improvement of the

territorial organisation of power, and implementation of the principles of subsidiarity and fiscal self-sufficiency [14, p. 171].

In order to secure the *жизнедіяльність* of territorial communities under martial law and enhance their capacity to operate in the new realities, it is advisable, when substantiating spatial development directions, to consider strengthening the community's self-development potential, problem-oriented management of human resources, and the use of digital platforms and data governance tools [16, p. 552]; an important component should be the formation of ecological culture as a prerequisite for responsible attitudes towards the natural environment and rational use of natural resources [4, p. 69], while organisational and economic measures should cover training of community representatives regarding mechanisms for supporting enterprises and internally displaced persons, adapting budget planning to wartime and post-war periods, preserving the country's intellectual and production potential, providing financial support to communities, improving regulatory policy, and ensuring economic and food security [7, p. 71].

In the context of enhancing the effectiveness of support for mountain territories, P. Zhuk emphasises the appropriateness of using practices adapted to Ukrainian conditions and tested in European countries; among such practices he singles out «improving the transport, social and municipal infrastructure of mountain regions; developing concepts and programmes for mountain-area development and providing state support for projects envisaged therein; creating mountain-area support funds; granting subsidies to agricultural producers in mountain localities and promoting their co-operation; supporting tourism, resorts, folk crafts and handicrafts; facilitating the creation of jobs in mountain localities in types of industrial activity that do not exert ecologically destructive impacts, focusing on small and medium-sized business; taking mountain specificities into account in fiscal equalisation mechanisms, etc» [5, p. 30].

Finally, as one of the most systemic options for institutionally strengthening the recreation and tourism specialisation of mountain territories, S. Kryshchanovych proposes creating entrepreneurial corporations in the the leading sector for mountain

territories, stressing that diversification increases their capacity to adapt to external changes and opens additional opportunities for improving efficiency, enhancing competitiveness, reducing risks through their distribution among partners, integrating production resources, and forming organisational structures for protecting common interests before state and regional authorities [12, p. 212].

**Conclusions.** The analysis demonstrates that sustainable environmentally oriented development of territorial communities in the Ukrainian Carpathians under contemporary conditions is not merely a programme declaration, but a practical governance imperative, because the local level concentrates the consequences of the war, demographic and migration shifts, infrastructure losses and environmental risks, while decentralisation has provided communities with instruments without which effective recovery and long-term planning are unattainable.

At the same time, despite the expansion of powers, the capacity of Carpathian communities to implement environmentally oriented strategies is constrained by shortages of managerial staff and competencies, misalignment of priorities between residents and local authorities, limited resource bases, and the need to rapidly combine reconstruction with increased economic activity; in these circumstances, strategic planning should integrate ecological limits and the potential of natural ecosystems, and it should be grounded in long-term orientation, stakeholder participation and evidence-informed decision-making.

Promising directions for improving local development policy should be linked to deeper partnerships with EU communities and the use of adapted European practices of mountain-area support, to the development of tourism and recreation specialisation as a basis for diversifying local economies, to strengthening ecological culture and modern digital management tools, and to the application of fiscal equalisation that reflects mountain specificities; ultimately, achieving sustainable results requires institutional reinforcement of local governance, the development of mechanisms of cross-sectoral co-operation, and a consistent transition from fragmented recovery measures to an integrated trajectory of environmentally oriented development.

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